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Intern Debriefing Report - 2009

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Debrief Report 2009 by Rani Suleman

Learning Goals I set out with

The learning goals that I set out with revolved around assisting the Orande and Nyanam Women Groups in the start of the probiotic yoghurt project. My goals were to establish a successful social marketing advertising campaign, work with developmental agencies and NGOs for partnering with them to ensure the project's success through their support, and to work with the Mamas on educating them on the health awareness of the yogurt which they can then communicate to other community members. My expected outcomes that resulted from the work I had planned to do in Kenya before I embarked on my journey to Oyugis were that the:

- Yogurt Mamas will be able to independently derive new creative means to promote the yogurt that will be culturally in-tune with the local communities through using the basis of the social marketing techniques derived before I departed Oyugis
- Possibility of attaining success through reaching a wider market for yogurt distribution will be more transparent as a more in-depth outlook on the success of the yogurt in Oyugis will be measurable

Goals Progress & Future Recommendation

Many of the goals I had set out with seemed unattainable once I arrived in Oyugis, as they were all dependent on the project having been up and running once I arrived. This was not the case. I, along with Jen and Amanda (the other two Oyugis Interns) quickly set out to begin the tasks of starting up the kitchen which involved organizing all the survey data and inputting them in a soft copy, organizing a Microfinance training and accepting tender bids for our suppliers amongst many other tasks.

My responsibilities for the first half of my work term consisted of organizing the Microfinance training with the aid of an NGO. Due to communication barriers, we could not solicit the help of the NGOs. Due to this I set out on researching what goes into a Microfinance training and thus set out to actually hold the session with the Orande women's group. In addition, I also prepared a Microfinance training manual which can be used at other WHE sites for training the Mamas. The training session and manual covered issues relating to sustainable business practices, sales, marketing, operations, and finance strategies that will aid the Mamas in the kitchen's success. We also extensively discussed issues regarding leadership and ethics throughout the internship.

In addition, during the start-up phase of the project, I spent a considerable amount of time working to ensure that the necessary equipment and tools were in place for the yoghurt production to successfully take place. For this, many trips were made to the town to purchase necessary items such as laptop equipment and supplies, paint, and posters. For the suppliers, I also drafted tender bids and supplier contracts that ensured that the parties involved in a business relationship with the project had to follow through on their commitments.

Along with the other two interns, I assisted organizing the training week that would be led by the Tukwamuane Women's Group for the Orande Women's Group. In addition, I helped organize distribution and sales strategy that the Mama would incorporate within the kitchen. These

revolved around the Mamas ensuring that they communicated the benefits of the yogurt, that every yogurt distributed and any yogurt sales were recorded in the daily roster. For the study to be successful, I also developed a method to contact the study clients that distribution had begun and continued to assign study clients to the intervention and control group. With this, I also ensured that accurate and up to date data was on file for the client I worked with. After time, I transferred this responsibility, while overseeing it, to the Mamas so they would get experience in handling patients data.

I also documented each of the Mamas profiles along with a picture of them to be posted on the WHE website. Along with this I also asked and noted down what the Mama's occupations were, why they were involved with the project and why they felt the project was important.

After working with the Nyanam Women's Group (Advocacy group) I also designed a poster that communicated the benefits of the yoghurt to the general public. This poster will be translated in Kiswahili and Luo by the Mamas to reach a wider catchment.

Changes in Priorities

Once I quickly arrived my initial goals had to be set aside. It is important to realize that every intern who travels to a foreign region must do so with a lot of flexibility. Since all my goals were dependent on the yoghurt production and distribution already underway I had to put those on the back burner while the other interns and I work efficiently to get the kitchen started. My main priority was to get the kitchen started. Within this, the priorities were to get milk suppliers, raise awareness of the kitchen within the community, gather lab supplies, hire a painter to paint the kitchen's exterior, get the lab equipment from KEMRI, organize training sessions with the Tukwamuane and Oyugis Mamas, and to ensure all the tasks are handled in an ethical manner were amongst the many other tasks we had to focus on.

After the distribution began, the priority then began to make sure that all the study clients had client ID cards and that they were advised of the importance of bringing it daily. Our tasks also consisted of going with the Mamas to each of the distribution centres for the whole day as many were very nervous and not as confident of independently distributing the yoghurt. As this was fine in the beginning, I quickly realized that this would place a heavy burden on the group as only a few Mamas knew how to distribute the yoghurt. After consulting with a few Mamas, it was decided that the Mamas would train other Mamas within the group on how to distribute the yoghurt. This thus empowered the Mamas as they were able to engage in an exchange of knowledge.

It is important for the next set of interns to focus on the control aspect of the study and aid Roy, the project coordinator, on any tasks he needs assistance with. It will also be vital for the interns to observe and note down how the daily operations of the kitchen are. Does it seem sustainable? Are practices ethical? It is also recommended for future interns to take Swahili lessons as they were really, really helpful for me when communicating with the Mamas and townspeople.

Recommendations

One of the important aspects that us three interns focused on was to always make sure we were not overbearing. We always had to keep in mind that we were foreigners and that our time was limited. We wanted to be there to enable the Mamas to be more independent and build more confidence in themselves. We did not want to be a source of weakness for the Mamas by doing everything by ourselves for the sake of time. This project was for the Mamas, and it would be wise to note that for any of the current and future projects as interns are only there for a set number of months. The Mamas are the ones propelling the project forward so the more they are able to do around the kitchen in terms of running it the better as that is when one of our big objective of empowering the Mamas is met.

In terms of the process the Oyugis kitchen had to endure through in order to get the money, it is important to limit the number of steps it requires to get the funds to the kitchen. Currently the process is very time consuming. In more than one occurrence, the project would have had to be halted as there was not enough cash around. Us interns injected the necessary amounts to keep the project on track as there were many stakeholders involved who were counting on the project to begin.

It is recommended that future interns have the opportunity to meet with the past interns. Before my departure, I independently set out to meet with a past intern. This was very helpful as I was able to learn a lot such as what to bring in terms of possessions etc. It is also helpful to speak about interns personal experiences with future interns.

Future interns should also be aware of power struggles between the different stakeholders in the project including the interns. In Oyugis, constant issues surfaced regarding the lack of adherence to quality standards in place such as washing hands so the production area is not contaminated. Even after couple of episodes of spoiled yoghurts occurring, the Mamas still defied the simple rules as washing hands is not a common practice in Kenya. In addition, the relationships between the Mamas and the project coordinator was frequently strained which placed a lot of stress with in the kitchen operations. Such dynamic relationships need to be handled sensitively.

Tips

Restaurants

Hotel Executive

Their chef Deborah cooks excellent meals. It is all made to order so you require to place your order couple of hours in advance. The hotel is located near the bank where we use to go to withdraw money as it was the only POS system in town. The food is great and will remind you of home albeit with a Kenya twist. Spaghetti with meat sauce and cooked cabbage on the side is delicious!

Hotel Vesture Villa

This is the restaurant in the hotel where we resided. The food was always incredibly slow even for simple dishes such as fries. The service was poor and the guards scary! We did eat here in the

beginning because we did not go out in the dark but after a while we got used to eating dinners at Hotel Executive

La Mola

Great Spanish Omelette with chapaties (flatbread). This is the only other hotel in town with flushing toilets (Hotel Vesture Villa was the other one). It is located right down the street from the yoghurt kitchen. Staff named Deborah also knew us well and was really sweet. You could also get cold soft drinks here!

Could only order a couple of things from the menu as most meals required at least an hour to prepare.

Damara View Hotel

Really great food. Recommend fried chicken and they also have cold soft drinks. This hotel has an incredible view and it is only a 5-7 minutes Boda Boda (bicycle taxis) ride from the centre of the town. Music is also great and is usually quiet. IT is located in a very picturesque area.

Mumbo View

This little eatery is located down the street from Hotel Vesture Villa and has really great beans and chapattis. The owner, George is also very friendly. He always let us watch the chapattis being made and gave us fresh ones.

Health Clinics

There is a public hospital in town where we went to get treated anytime we were sick. It is called the Rachuonyo Distict Hospital. Our principal investigator for the project, Francis Aila, works there. The hospital is also one of the distribution centres for the project.

Market Vendors

Know how to bargain! Most fruits, vegetables, and clothes vendors expect you to bargain. Be ready to be quoted ridiculously high prices according to local standards because you are a Mzungu (foreigner). We always tried to bargain as we did not want to perpetuate the stereotype that Mzungus are loaded with money/ are cash cows. We also did not feel it right to part with money when it was unfair. We did always make an effort to purchase from the local vendors to show our support to them.

There is also a supermarket in town called Shivling where we purchased airtime, bread, peanut butter, jelly and bottled water amongst other goods.

Money Exchange

We just used the POS machine at the bank to withdraw money using our credit card. When that did not work as it would sometimes be down, we used the MPESA (mobile banking) systems to withdraw money.

Internet Connections

The Koyatta cyber café is where I made some of my really great friends who I still keep in touch today. Our relationship mainly blossomed from the lack of good connectivity so be prepared to wait a long time before even a single email is downloaded!

There is also another internet café near the kitchen which is called Oyugis net that has better internet connection.

Local Friends Network

Our local friends who showed us around were mainly Roy (project coordinator) and the group of boys we befriended at the internet café and the local high school. It was hard to befriend girls as girls traditionally had more responsibility within the households. There were also time where we were not accepted due to our backgrounds as some felt intimidated by us.

Salons

There are great hairbraiding salons that I went to. They are located throughout the town. Although I can't remember where I went, most that I saw were very good. Be ready for a painful experience as you get your hair braided and make sure to pop a couple of painkillers before and after! Also make sure to be ready to spend at least couple of hours at the salon to get your hair braided. I spent about 5 hours there. It was worth it though! Local townspeople though I was a Mwafrika (African).

Local Transportation Network

Matatus

Vans that can really fit max 14 people but somehow get 23 stuffed in there. Great fun, great music, and sometimes great company. Rides to Kisumu should not be more than 150 KSH and to Kisi should be around 70 KSH. Be ready to be squished in with people on a bumpy ride. We had a lot of fun jamming to the music. Near midway through the summer I even took it by myself! We also took the matatus to travel to different parts of Kenya. Just make sure it is a reputable company by speaking with trusted local friends.

Also be prepared to catcalls and hoots from the matatu bus conductors. They all want you to get in their car. Make sure you travel with someone with experience in the beginning to assist you during the ride as bus conductors are known to be shrewd to take you to the wrong destinations just to get your bus fare!

Boda Bodas

Bicycle taxis. Very fun and comfortable! There are always loads of them around especially in the centre of the market.

Motorcycle

Means to destination through a cheaper fare than a matatu and it gets you directly from point A to B. You will find a cluster of them around the town's centre.